

WIT facing another key personnel change



Set for departure: WIT President Dr Ruaidhri Neavyn. | Photo: Mick Wall

President set to depart as TUI ballot beckons

Just weeks before the release of a Government-commissioned report into getting a proposed merger and university application between WIT and IT Carlow back on track, the Department of Education has sought the secondment of WIT's President Dr Ruaidhri Neavyn to the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

Should Dr Neavyn depart WIT, it will be the second major change in key personnel at the Institute in less than six months.

Dr Donie Ormonde resigned from his position as chair of WIT's governing body late last year following a meeting with Minister for Education Jan O'Sullivan over the Institute's withdrawal from the merger talks.

Dr Neavyn's secondment is subject to approval from WIT's governing body, which is due to meet tomorrow morning to consider the request. Ahead of this meeting, the Governing Body has sought the views of staff on the secondment.

The new role will focus on "the development of the Technological Sector encompassing the existing institutes of technology", according to a WIT spokesperson.

It is expected to be for a number of years. Dr Neavyn would be formally employed by the department rather than by the HEA if approval is granted. A college spokesperson could not confirm whether an acting president would be appointed in his

absence.

Dr Neavyn took up the role of WIT president in January 2012, having previously served as president of IT Carlow. Plans were already underway at that stage to merge Waterford and Carlow ITs to create a TU of the South East. WIT withdrew from talks on the merger process last October, following the publication of a report which suggested WIT would reach the academic, staffing and other criteria necessary for TU status far quicker on its own. However all indications are that the Government is committed to abiding by HEA rules set out three years ago, that only two or more merged institutes -of technology can seek TU designation.

Michael Kelly, who was appointed by Minister for Education to get the TU of the South East project back on track, is expected to deliver his report to the Minister by the end of this month.

Meanwhile, lecturers and research staff at WIT are being balloted this week on whether they will go on strike if the Government forces through a merger with IT Carlow.

And Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI) spokesperson Aidan Kenny said there was huge concern expressed about political interference in the autonomy of WIT at a branch meeting in the Institute last Thursday night. The point was made that the chair of the governing body previously resigned without the provision of a full explanation.

“We had concerns about the resignation of the chair of the Governing Body Dr Donie Ormonde last year and it now seems there is a similar type of approach being used against the President”, Mr Kenny commented.

At Thursday’s meeting, TUI members unanimously endorsed a motion to ballot members in opposition to the South East Technological University (SETU) merger proposal.

The branch is demanding the requirement for forced mergers be removed from the draft legislation, so that WIT can apply for Technological University status in its own right without having to first merge with Carlow.

The proposed industrial action includes non-cooperation with the SETU proposal, work to rule up to and including strike action.

A similar ballot was recently conducted amongst academic and research staff at ITs in Cork and Tralee, with 92% of staff at Cork and 86% at Tralee voting for industrial action.

And the TUI’s Carlow branch passed a motion on Monday saying they will also commence a ballot for non-cooperation and work to rule up to and including strike action.